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S E C R E T SOFIA 001719

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [BU](#) [IZ](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA PROPOSES MINIMAL FOLLOW-ON MISSION IN IRAQ

REF: SOFIA 01639

Classified By: AMB. JOHN BEYRLER FOR REASON 1.4 (a,b)

1. (U) This is an action request. See Para 8

2. (S) Summary: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed DCM Oct. 7 that Bulgaria,s follow-on military activity in Iraq would consist of 40 soldiers dedicated to the NATO Training (NTM-I) and Multi-National Security Transition Command (MNSTC-I) missions. It also confirmed that the current contingent would remain in Iraq through the December elections. The briefing ended with a request for "feedback" on the government,s decision. End Summary

3. (C) The decision was taken Oct. 4 by leaders of the three political parties that make up the ruling coalition, including PM Stanishev. According to Plamen Bonchev, MFA director for NATO and International Security, President Purvanov has already been briefed on the decision, which will be presented to the Council of Ministers Oct. 13. This timeline meets their previous assurances that a final decision would be made before Purvanov,s Oct. 17 White House meeting.

4. (C) Both the NTM-I and NATO Missions had been included in our Engagement Team,s brief (Ref), although the NTM-I presentation stressed the need for force protection rather than instructors. Bonchev said the actual positions to be filled in both missions would be decided at the expert level, but they envisioned individual officers assuming specific positions as they became available, rather than the deployment of a 40-person unit.

5. (C) In addition, the political leaders confirmed the current contingent would remain in Iraq through the Dec. 15 elections. Its departure would begin the following week in order to meet the Parliamentary deadline of a December 31 withdrawal. Bonchev asked for U.S. logistical support in making this timeline work.

6. (S) In response to Bonchev,s request for feedback, DCM replied there was clearly the hope for a larger and more meaningful contribution from Bulgaria, but we would seek an official Washington response.

7. (C) Comment: Bulgaria,s decision is disappointing, especially in light of its military,s strong desire for a more robust follow-on mission. It does, however, follow a policy announced six months ago and will likely be acceptable to a much larger percentage of the Bulgarian public. We believe additional contributions to other international missions may also be a possibility. Given the continuing high political sensitivities of this issue, we think the best tactics are to accept this decision with statements of appreciation for Bulgaria,s contributions and sacrifices in Iraq, while continuing to work with them on gradually increasing their participation.

8. (U) Action Request: Please provide guidance in response to request for feedback on this decision. In addition, it would be useful to know how many positions are currently available between the two missions and if an increase in the proposed participation would be operationally useful.

BEYRLER